

BMCW Settlement Agreement Community Meeting

Children's Health Education Center of Milwaukee

August 21, 2006

1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Questions from the audience:

1. Do you have the number of children per caseload?

A: The average number of family cases per case manager, as stated in the report, is 10. Cases may have multiple children. The average number of children assigned per caseload manager is 16.8.

2. Give an example of what you'd say to a parent who can't read or understand the process of termination of parental rights.

A: In addition to case managers, who work with the birth family, the BMCW funds a permanency counselor at Children's Court whose job is to help the parent understand the process and the options open to them. This includes:

- Going over the termination of parental rights, federal guidelines for timeliness and what the parent is facing regarding meeting court conditions for reunification.
- Explaining terminology and the step by step process.
- Collaborating with the ongoing case manager and permanency consultants regarding permanency planning.
- Clarifying to the parent their role in court hearings.
- Working with the parent to make the best decision for them and their children.

3. Why do birth families feel there is a rush to TPR? How are we ensuring their rights are protected? Senator Taylor's office receives calls from parents who feel there is a rush to take their children from them. What can the office tell people?

A: The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) guidelines require child welfare agencies to begin the process of the termination of parental rights when the child has been in out-of-home care for 15 of the past 22 months unless there is a documented exemption. Although this seems like a short time in adult terms, it is important for the stability of a child that the child bonds to a permanent family as soon as possible.

When a child goes into out-of-home care, concurrent planning begins. This means a reunification plan is in place at the same time all other permanency options are discussed in the event that reunification does not occur. The parent is informed of the guidelines and the permanency plan throughout all court proceedings and meeting with the BMCW. Ongoing case managers also emphasize the timelines.

The final decision regarding the child is made by the Court, which provides an attorney to represent the parent.



We ask the Senator's office to advise callers to work with their case manager to meet the conditions the court has set. The BMCW's role is to assist birth parents with this task.

4. Are children in out-of-home care counted separately if a termination of parental rights (TPR) has been filed or they are with a relative?

- A. The children counted in the out-of-home care numbers do not include those for which a TPR has been *granted* and whose primary worker is an adoption case manager. Children who are placed with a relative on a court-order are counted in the out-of-home care numbers unless, similar to other children, a TPR has been granted and the primary worker is an adoption worker.

5. Do we have any information on the number of kids who were adopted and now turning 18 and whose adoptive parents are no longer providing services?

- A. The BMCW emphasizes permanency as a "forever family." This means that parental support continues beyond the age of 18, as it would with a birth family. Because once a child is adopted, the case closed and the involvement of the BMCW ends, we have no way to track whether or not adoptive parents continue to provide financial, physical, or emotional support.

6. What happens if a child is almost 18 and the worker discharges him without resources?

- A: Independent living services begin when youth in out-of-home care are 15^{1/2}. These include an assessment of the child's skill in managing daily tasks (grocery shopping, laundry, employment, etc.) and a plan to have the care provider address the development of these skills. At 17^{1/2}, youth are referred to the Lad Lake Connections program which continues to provide assistance and guidance until the youth is 21. The Lad Lake program is voluntary because the BMCW has no legal authority over youth after they turn 18 (or 19 if they are on track to graduate from high school and under a CHIPS order).

7. Are we looking to try to find adoptive homes for older kids?

- A: Yes, however, the adoption of older children is a challenge for several reasons. The issue of the termination of parental rights may be more complicated than in younger children where often there is a previous history of children being removed from the family and the TPR moves more quickly. Adolescents may often resist the idea of adoption as they are more conscious of the connection to birth parents. Finding adoptive homes for older children is also a challenge.

As of June 30, 2006, there were 15 youth ages 12 and older for which full recruitment efforts are underway.



8. Are there systemic issues that impact the parent? For example, when the parent loses the children, the W2 payments end. The parent then has no income and loses housing. The children cannot be returned if the mother is without housing.

A: Department of Workforce Development Secretary Gassman and Department of Health and Family Services Secretary Helene Nelson have been working on ways to better integrate the child welfare system and Wisconsin Works (W2).

At this time, there is a pilot project at La Causa that involves working with families receiving W2 to identify risks to child safety and provide services before a crisis occurs.

9. How does someone get referred to the pilot program that works with W2?

A: UMOS, which is the W2 agency serving the area served by La Causa refers families into the program.

10. What kind of contracted services are available for African Americans (in regard to working with W2)? Are similar services available on the north side to provide the services to African Americans using the UMOS/La Causa model?

A: UMOS and La Causa serve families of all ethnicities living within its geographical borders. In regard to the location of services, a similar pilot project is to begin on the north side.

11. Is it part of La Causa's \$6 million contract?

A: No. This is a specially funded pilot project.

12. What is the number of potential foster parents recruited so far under the faith-based initiatives?

A: We have had 22 church groups that have come forward. Since the initiative is new, we have not yet seen its full impact but are hoping for successful numbers. The effort is also to provide congregational support to families already in our faith-communities who are caring for children as foster parents or kinship care providers.

13. When did the faith-based initiative begin?

A: The effort began in May 2006 when 48 church representatives participated representing 22 communities making a commitment to help in some way.

14. Is the availability of the Mobility Urgent Treatment Team for Foster Family (MUTT-FF) services part of foster parent training?

A: Yes, the service is addressed in training, a brochure is placed in the training packet, and in the placement packet, and refrigerator magnets with the number on are also provided. Mention is made of the service in the Kids Connection newsletter to foster parents and a



MUTT-FF representative attends staff meetings to speak to BMCW case managers about the service. Both ongoing case managers and licensing specialists also remind foster parents of the service and may make referrals.

15. What is the breakdown between daytime/nighttime calls to MUTT-FF?

A: The majority of calls are in the afternoon and evening, however, during the school year calls are received for service related to school issues during the day.

16. What are the issues with school involvement?

A: The calls cover many topics. Sometimes it is school attendance. Sometimes calls may come prior to a school suspension.

17. How is parental consent handled for MUTT-FF?

A. The BMCW, as the custodian of the child, has authority through the Court to authorize MUTT-FF services. For inpatient services provided by regular MUTT staff, the legal guardian/parent's consent is needed.

18. Placement Stability - If I challenge the ongoing case manager and ask for services, I'm threatened with the children being removed. Is this a cultural bias/is that an issue?

A. It is never acceptable for any BMCW staff person to threaten to remove children due to conflict with either a birth parent or foster parent. We encourage staff to work with families. We provide supervisory assistance and have a complaint resolution process for times when the conflict is not resolved at the case management level.

The issue of lack of services has not been identified as a reason for change of placement. The ongoing case management and licensing staff work closely together to ensure the needs of the child and foster parent are met, which includes supervisory consultation and input. There are many checks and balances between programs to ensure children only change placements when absolutely necessary.

19. What have you done for the last five years regarding the issue of placement stability?

A: First Choice for Children has supported the stability of foster care placements with the creation of support plans that identify the support the foster parent may need to enable a successful placement. Crisis stabilization meetings are also held following an event in care that may lead to disruption of placement. Coordinated Service Team meetings bring everyone working with the child, including the foster and birth parents, together to discuss the progress toward permanence. Joint home visits between licensing and ongoing staff also ensure children are stable in their placement and the foster parent is receiving the support they need.



20. What is the success rate of those strategies? Are we waiting for a crisis before putting in services?

A: The ongoing case manager provides an assessment of the child to the placement specialist who then tries to match the child to a foster home that can meet the child's needs. Foster parents are the best source of information on services they and the child need to stabilize placement. Services to birth families and the child need to be in place within 21 days. At the minimum, quarterly stabilization meetings provide an ongoing overview and assessment of a child's needs and what services need to be implemented to stabilize a placement and support the foster parent.

21. The report indicates that the placement folders are not being provided to the foster parents. It is important that the information about the child follows the child to placement. Why hasn't this been happening?

A: This is an area we have identified for improvement. Staff will be instructed to ensure delivery of the folder and to document that the folder has been received by filing a copy of the signed receipt form in the child's case file.

22. What are the top 2 to 3 reasons foster homes are closing.

A:

- 1.) Family composition changes (new baby born, divorce, etc.) or the family cannot meet licensing requirements (moved to another residence that can't be licensed).
- 2.) The foster parents decide that they don't want to foster/need a break from foster parenting.
- 3.) There have been a child abuse/neglect investigation that has been substantiated or unsubstantiated and there is concern about the home to the point a home needs to be closed.

23. Regarding the mentioned request for proposals for group settings for youth. Don't you have group homes already? Do you have too many beds for the number of children?

A: The capacity in group homes is far above the need. The request for proposals, however, is directed more at the need for specialized services. The BMCW is seeking creative approaches to address the needs of particular populations, which include pregnant/parenting teens, youth who are chronically AWOL, and those with alcohol and other drug dependencies as well as a limited number of general homes. The focus will be on programming and outcomes.

24. Where are the areas the BMCW still needs to improve?

A: Regarding compliance with the Settlement Agreement, the BMCW is still struggling with:

- Timely permanency for children



- Placement Stability
- Length of stay in adolescent centers
- ASFA compliance
- Progress is being made, and BMCW is close to meeting requirements on:
- Adoption with 24 months

25. The Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) found an error in the way the BMCW calculates ASFA compliance. What has happened to how to measure that outcome?

A: The error was in the calculation of what is the 15th month of care. The BMCW was calculating the month based on the end of the first month in care. The LAB determined that the first month should be counted as month one. BMCW recalculated Period 3.

26. There are funds allocated for foster children - about \$103 million. This goes to about 3,000 children, compared to the much greater number of children who were in care when the BMCW started. Is there a tracking system for the dollars to ensure the state gives them to Milwaukee?

A: Milwaukee County was grossly under-funded for the care of foster children, which led to the lawsuit brought by Children's Rights and the Settlement Agreement. Milwaukee receives all the federal funds for its foster children that come through the state. Fiscal spending is monitored on a monthly bases by state fiscal staff.

27. Regarding the new medical home model, are you going to continue on a fee for service for Medical Assistance?

A: Yes. Under the new medical home model for health care being developed, fee for service will continue.

28. There is an increase in the number of pregnant teens. How will the medical model work with their children?

A: It is still early on in the planning process, but the public can be assured that the new system will not ignore any child.

29. I would like an update on Subsidized Guardianship initiative as an alternative to adoption. Any indication that this is working?

A: Since beginning in October 2005 until June 30, 2006, 133 children achieved permanency through this program. An initial group of families was grandfathered into the program, however, eligibility is now through a lottery assignment. As required by the federal guidelines, the impact of the program is currently being evaluated by contracted researchers, and the evaluation will take place over the next five years.

